

“THE SUFFICIENCY OF SCRIPTURE.”

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Sermon Texts: Deuteronomy 12:32; 29:29; II Timothy 3:14-17; I Peter 1:23; Jude 1:3

Introduction.

We come this evening to the final of five articles in the Belgic Confession that deal with Scripture. We have studied the inspiration of Scripture, the Canon, the Apocrypha, the authority of Scripture and tonight the sufficiency of Scripture. No other doctrine receives this much attention in the Confession.

This tells you how central this doctrine is to our faith and to everything else we believe. This also tells us how central the doctrine of Scripture is to our Reformed faith. Reformed theology is profoundly Bible centered and Biblically grounded. We have to get the foundation right.

Remember the Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus.

Luke 16:19-31 “There was a rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day. 20 And at his gate was laid a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, 21 who desired to be fed with what fell from the rich man's table. Moreover, even the dogs came and licked his sores. 22 The poor man died and was carried by the angels to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried, 23 and in Hades, being in torment, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham far off and Lazarus at his side. 24 And he called out, ‘Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus to dip the end of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am in anguish in this flame.’ 25 But Abraham said, ‘Child, remember that you in your lifetime received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner bad things; but now he is comforted here, and you are in anguish. 26 And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, in order that those who would pass from here to you may not be able, and none may cross from there to us.’ 27 And he said, ‘Then I beg you, father, to send him to my father's house— 28 for I have five brothers—so that he may warn them, lest they also come into this place of torment.’ 29 But Abraham said, ‘They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.’ 30 And he said, ‘No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent.’ 31 He said to him, ‘If they do not hear Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead.’”

This is a story about the sufficiency of Scripture. The rich man is basically saying that Moses and the Prophets aren't enough to convince someone of their need for salvation. He wants something more than the Word of God. Maybe another miracle, maybe some dramatic experience, maybe someone rising from the dead? What God said isn't enough.

Belgic Confession, Article Seven.

The Belgic Confession is a historical document, written in a specific time period out of specific conditions. It rose out of the Protestant Reformation and the opposition to particular Roman Catholic doctrines that had departed from Scripture under the leadership of corrupt or heretical popes.

During the middle ages certain man-made doctrines crept into the church. One of them was the infallibility of the pope and that when he spoke officially his word was equal to the Bible. Added to this was the claim that the traditions of the church had authority equal to that of Scripture.

At the Council of Trent in April of 1547 they declared:

“... this truth and discipline are contained in the written books, and the unwritten traditions ... [the Synod] following the examples of the orthodox Fathers, receives and venerates with an equal affection of piety and

reverence, all the books of the Old and of the New Testament – seeing that one God is the author of both – as also the said traditions ... But if any one ... knowingly and deliberately condemn the traditions aforesaid; let him be anathema.”

This is a declaration of the insufficiency of the Word of God.

The Roman Catholic Church has not recanted or repented of that position. This is one of the reasons that the modern movement called Evangelicals and Catholics Together is misguided. There are serious differences in doctrine and practice that are contradictory and irreconcilable.

The reason for such a long article on this particular point is because of the controversy that raged during the time of the reformation.

Two Key Texts:

If I told you that God told me that the Scripture is sufficient for our faith and practice and eternal salvation, you should only accept one reason for me saying that. If I say it based on Scripture.

II Timothy 3:14-17 But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it 15 and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. 16 All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, 17 that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

Jude 1:3 Beloved, although I was very eager to write to you about our common salvation, I found it necessary to write appealing to you to contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints.

“In other words, the Scriptures are sufficient in the sense that they are the only (“once for all”) inspired and (therefore) inerrant words of God that we need, in order to know the way of salvation (“make you wise unto salvation”) and the way of obedience (“equipped for every good work”)” (John Piper).

Do you ever wish God would speak to you? Do you ever hear someone say that God spoke to them and wish you could have the same experience? Have you ever prayed and asked God to speak to you in some clear way? And then wait for some voice, all the while your Bible is sitting next to you closed.

The Doctrine of the Sufficiency of Scripture.

God is God. God is infinite and unfathomable and beyond figuring out. God is infinite in wisdom, knowledge, understanding and power. God cannot be reduced to our understanding. We cannot get there from here. We can know nothing about God except what He chooses to reveal to us about Himself. If God were silent, we would be in utter darkness regarding truth, righteousness, salvation and eternal life.

God has not revealed everything, there are secret things that belong only to God (Deuteronomy 29:29). Even in heaven when we see clearly, we will not see or know everything.

But God according to the counsel of His will and His own good pleasure has revealed much to us and especially He has revealed to us all that is necessary for our salvation and faith and growth in holiness.

This is called the doctrine of the completeness or the sufficiency of Scripture.

The Holy Scriptures as we have them in the Old and New Testaments perfectly, completely and exactly contain the will of God for us. Everything that we must believe to be saved and have eternal life is sufficiently taught right here.

This is the perfect record of God's ways on earth and His deeds for our salvation. This teaches us all the necessary and essential doctrines for salvation and service to our God, making plain our depravity, our deliverance and our duty.

This is all the revelation that God intends for us to have. Jesus said many others things that were not recorded. And inspired men wrote other letters, at least one, maybe two more to the Corinthians and one to the Laodicians. What we have is all that God ordained for us to have.

No other traditions should be added.

No other human writings

No other decrees from popes, councils, synods.

No other public opinion or private interpretation.

Every other voice must submit to this voice. We are bound by nothing but the Word of God.

This conviction led *Guido de Bres* (author of the Belgic Confession) to write to King Philip I:

“In short, we see that we are bidden to follow only the word of God and not what we think fit, and that we are forbidden to add or subtract anything from the holy commandments of Almighty God.”

And this conviction led *Martin Luther* to reply to his accusers:

“Your Imperial Majesty and Your Lordships demand a simple answer. Here it is, plain and unvarnished. Unless I am convicted [convinced] of error by the testimony of Scripture or (since I put no trust in the unsupported authority of Pope or councils, since it is plain that they have often erred and often contradicted themselves) by manifest reasoning, I stand convicted [convinced] by the Scriptures to which I have appealed, and my conscience is taken captive by God's word, I cannot and will not recant anything, for to act against our conscience is neither safe for us, nor open to us. On this I take my stand. I can do no other. God help me. Amen.”

The same goes for me. I am a man under authority, under the authority of the Word of God. My conscience is bound to this book. What it says God says. What it commands I must do. By this book I may be held accountable.

This doctrine requires humility on our part to bow to the authority of Scripture and accept it as it is, the very Word of God. Part of our humbly accepting its authority and its sufficiency is accepting the answers it gives and not asking for answers it doesn't give. Nor should we demand answers that are more to our liking. We can't ask God to answer our questions, as if we can put Him on the witness stand.

Application and conclusion.

Remember what you have learned and from whom you learned it and continue to be a student of God's Word all your life. Never cease in your desire to know God and His wisdom and will.

Take God at His Word, trust and obey. Don't add to or detract from. Don't put equal weight or trust in the footnotes or study notes in your Bible or in any devotional book.

Don't get taken in by all the talk about lost books of the Bible or the newly discovered sayings of Jesus. There cannot be nor will there be any new or further revelations from heaven until Jesus returns. This is enough.

Anyone who suggests that they have wisdom or writings that should be read alongside the Bible is saying something contrary to Scripture and is actually diminishing the authority of the Bible.

Furthermore, nothing is a sin that is not explicitly or implicitly forbidden by Scripture. So man-made rules about eating meat, or going to movies, or drinking coke, or wearing jeans to church may be individual choices but not a measure of righteousness. Parents can make such rules for a time and season in a family, but if a church raise such a rule to the level of a moral command, they have gone beyond Scripture by adding a rule to Scripture.

Finally, our confidence in the Word of God comes from the Word of God and not from anything else. If real wood from Noah's ark was found would that increase your confidence in the truth of the story? If a piece of the Ark of the Covenant was found would that give you firmer reason of believing? If the Shroud of Turin was proved beyond a shadow of a doubt to be the real burial cloth of Jesus, would that boost your confidence in the crucifixion?

None of these things or anything else can add to or detract from the authority or truthfulness of Scripture.

You can have complete confidence in the Word of God whatever the world may say. It is the verbally inspired, infallible, inerrant, trustworthy and true, eternal Word of God. This is our rule for faith and practice. This is our life.

“It is written, “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.”” (Matthew 4:4).

Therefore, to not trust God's authoritative, sufficient, clear, necessary, inerrant, complete and final word in Bible is not to trust God Himself

God is infinitely good and He knows all that we need and He has perfectly provided what we need in His Word. Scripture is a wonderfully perfect gift from God, an expression of His great love for us. Psalm 19 and 119 are beautiful psalms written in praise and thanksgiving for the Scriptures. With this I close:

Psalm 19:7-11 The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul;
the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple;
8 the precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart;
the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes;
9 the fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever;
the rules of the Lord are true, and righteous altogether.
10 More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold;
sweeter also than honey and drippings of the honeycomb.
11 Moreover, by them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward.

Prayer:

Father thank you for your Word. Thank you for light of the gospel of the glory of Christ that you have caused to shine in our hearts to give us knowledge of you in your Son (I Corinthians 4:4,6). Thank you for your indescribable gift persevered and protected and given to your church to defend and pass on from generation to generation. Thank you for the faithfulness of those who have gone before us and for those who have taught us your Word. Father, receive our thanksgiving and gratitude in the name of Jesus. Amen.